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C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 007494

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TAGS: PTER PGOV MARR PHUM PINR CO

SUBJECT: GOC-ELN PROCESS MIGHT BE PICKING UP STEAM

REF: BOGOTA 6865

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood

Reason: 1.4 (b,d)

Summary

¶1. (C) Peace Commissioner Luis Carlos Restrepo will shortly present GOC military commander and negotiator Antonio Garcia with a formal GOC peace proposal on cease-fire, disarmament, and the ELN's possible participation in the political process, said GOC-ELN civil society guarantor Alejo Vargas. Restrepo confirmed the outline of the proposal in a recent dinner with the Ambassador. Vargas said the parties understood the need for a cease-fire prior to addressing other substantive topics and were focused on modalities. The fourth round of talks is expected to convene in Havana in September, following the NAM Summit. End summary.

GOC Has Proposal for ELN

¶2. (C) Vargas told us ELN negotiator Francisco Galan said on August 7 Restrepo had prepared a peace proposal for the ELN and would present it to Garcia personally. Vargas understood the GOC proposal would address cease-fire, disarmament, and the ELN's possible participation in the political system. Vargas' description of the GOC proposal is consistent with Restrepo's comments in an August 8 dinner with the Ambassador (septel).

¶3. (C) Vargas claimed the GOC and ELN understood the need for a cease-fire before discussing other substantive issues. He said the principal task now was to define the modalities of a cease-fire, including where ELN troops would concentrate and how the organization would finance itself during the cease-fire period. In an August 5 meeting with us, the Norwegian MFA point person for the GOC-ELN talks, Johan Vibe, said he had told guarantors Moritz Akerman and Alvaro Jimenez in Oslo the ELN suggestion that Norway pay USD 18 million to finance a six month ELN cease-fire was "not appetizing." Vibe explained the ELN idea was not new and Norway could not "reward" the terrorist group in this way. However, Norway was willing to consider other creative proposals to help sustain the ELN during a cease-fire if the process was serious and the GOC and international community approved.

¶ 4. (C) Vargas predicted the parties would approach the next round of talks in Havana (likely to take place after the September 14-15 NAM Summit in Cuba) in a creative way. Both Restrepo and Garcia appeared willing to "break the mold" of traditional peace talks, he said.

ELN and FARC Processes Linked?

¶ 5. (C) Vargas noted the complex relationship between the fledgling ELN and possible FARC peace talks. He said the Pastrana administration relegated the ELN process to a secondary level because it wanted to concentrate on delivering a FARC deal. In recent weeks, Vargas had the impression the GOC was doing the same. Now, however, Vargas said the GOC appeared ready to test the ELN's commitment to peace with a serious proposal. If FARC talks eventually got underway, Vargas said he would worry about the GOC's interest in combining the processes, which he said would be a mistake.

ELN Interest in Political Role

¶ 6. (C) Vargas said Garcia and other ELN leaders had long been interested in a political role, although they did not necessarily have expectations of being able to run for office themselves. Political participation would be difficult to imagine while the ELN remained an armed group. He indicated one possibility if talks were successful might be lower-level ELN members running for mayor or local councilor positions. Vargas did not rule out an ELN interest in competing in 2007 local elections, but said this was unlikely because the process would probably not be concluded by then.

Punishment Not Yet on Agenda

¶ 7. (C) Vargas confirmed the ELN had not yet begun to consider the price it might have to pay to participate in politics. The guarantors are planning a series of workshops at the Casa de Paz on this issue. Vargas understood that future ELN amnesty would likely to be retroactively applied to the paramilitaries. He said the ELN would be loathe to have that as its legacy. Vargas suggested that Galan understood better than other ELN leaders the importance of a "justice" component to a future peace deal.

Role of Accompanying Countries

¶ 8. (C) Norwegian MFA representative Vibe said Restrepo had asked Norway, Switzerland, and Spain to designate a lead interlocutor on the ELN talks from their respective capitals. Vibe's impression of Restrepo's request was that the Peace Commissioner regarded the accompanying countries as too soft on the ELN and wanted to encourage stiffer action from capitals. Vibe was the Norwegian designee, and Switzerland had Ambassador Didier Pfirter following the process. In Vibe's view, Spain might encounter difficulties as an accompanying country following Spanish Vice President Fernandez de la Vega's recent comments in Bogota saying the Spain-ETA talks were only possible because ETA had not killed anyone for three years. This could tie Spain's hands, Vibe suggested.

ELN Leadership Dynamics

¶ 9. (C) Vibe said his meetings with Galan at the Casa de Paz had convinced him Galan did not have authority to commit the ELN. He was an "antennae, not a decision maker." By

contrast, Garcia had the aura of a leader. He frequently got angry during previous rounds of talks and was prepared to show it. His soft spoken image and status as a self proclaimed poet masked a tough negotiator. Guarantor Vargas said the ELN Central Command (COCE) had apparently elected its 5th member to replace one who died; the identity of the new COCE member would tell us something about the organization's leanings on peace talks.

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